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## MBA 640.60: Human Resource Management

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## Mgt. 640: Strategic Human Resource Management

Fall Semester 2001

Dr. Lynda Brown

### Contact Information:

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### Course Overview and Framework

Of the many varied factors that are cited as contributing to the effectiveness of modern organizations, the human element is clearly the most critical. Regardless of the size or nature of an organization, the activities it undertakes and the environment in which it operates, its success is determined by the decisions its employees make and their behaviors.

Managers are becoming much more cognizant of the fact that a critical source of competitive advantage often comes not from having the most ingenious product design or service, the best marketing strategy, the most state-of-the-art technology, or the most savvy financial management, *but from having the appropriate systems for attracting, motivating and managing the organization's people.*

The function of managing people was traditionally considered just that in organizations, a separate functional area, usually called "personnel." ***The contemporary perspective is that all managers and supervisors, regardless of the function in which they specialize, are human resource managers and that no manager can expect to advance within his or her organization and career unless he or she can effectively manage people toward meeting divisional and organizational goals.***

Despite the fact that managers in many organizations recognize the importance of effective people management, management of a firm's human assets is often one of the most neglected functions in organizations. Many technical specialists lack the training and skills to handle human issues while others are swamped with technical matters, leaving them little time to devote to people issues.

**Mgmt. 640, Strategic Human Resource Management, will revolve around two themes: 1) how to think systematically and strategically about managing an organization's human assets, and 2) how the management of human assets can provide an organization with a distinct competitive advantage in the marketplace.**

This course is not intended to turn students into HR practitioners or experts on the technical aspects of HR. We are taking a general management perspective toward the

management of human resources and therefore will cover the main content areas of HR but not get into highly technical areas of concern to human resource professionals (such as psychometric dimensions of test validation, the specifics of job evaluation methods, or the detailed aspects of job grading or classification).

Instead, we will explicitly adopt the perspective of the general manager and address human resource topics from a strategic perspective. When we discuss topics such as selection, performance appraisal, training and compensation, our perspective will be twofold:

- How choices in these areas relate to the organization's strategic objectives and can impact company performance and
- The role that you as a manager can/should play in implementing *effective* HR systems and processes in your organization

### **Course Goals and Objectives**

Within the two general themes, the specific course objectives are to:

- Develop an understanding of the critical domains of human resource management and how it "fits" with other functional areas and corporate strategy
- Help you understand the manager's role in an organization's human resource arsenal
- Increase your knowledge of how the functions and processes of "HR" influence individual attitudes, behavior, and productivity as well as overall organization performance
- Gain insights into how to manage people more effectively in a variety of organizational settings and situations
- Develop proficiency in assessing the impact of an organization's strategy on the design of appropriate HR philosophies and programs
- Learn techniques to recruit and retain talented, motivated employees in competitive labor markets
- Examine cultural and international variations of human resource management that impact global competitiveness
- Understand the role of human resource management in assisting an organization's adaptation to change
- Develop the analytical and measurement skills to assess the impact that an organization's human resource practices have on its performance and effectiveness

### **Course Materials**

Textbook: Mello, J. Strategic Human Resource Management. South-Western/Thomson Learning, 2002©. NOTE: You are expected to ***read all*** of the material assigned for each week as well as the capstone cases. Come to class fully prepared, since you will be expected to discuss the material in class.

Additional reading: You are expected to regularly read business periodicals and newspapers and pay attention to issues that relate to the topics we are discussing. (Example: if there are headlines about major layoffs, living wage issues, strikes or labor negotiations, discrimination lawsuits, etc., tune in, bring information to class to share.) Your class participation will be measured by the information you share in class, i.e., your willingness/ability to engage in discussion on the relevant topics of the week. These additional insights from outside reading will help you and your classmates learn even more about the important issues of managing people effectively. You will also need to do some additional research/reading for your paper and the case analysis.

## **SCHEDULE, TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Assignment</u>
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### **The Context of Strategic Human Resource Management**

9/4 Week 1	Introduction to class; discussion of syllabus and assignments; BE SURE TO READ THE TWO ARTICLES IN THIS CHAPTER AHEAD OF CLASS.	Chapter 1
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9/11 Week 2	Trends In Human Resource Management; Strategic Planning	Chapt. 2,3
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9/18 Week 3	The Evolving/Strategic Role of HR; Human Resource Planning	Chapt.4, 5
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9/25 Week 4	Design and Redesign of Work Systems	Chapt.6
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10/2 Week 5	Employment Law	Chapt.7
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### **The Content of Strategic Human Resource Management**

10/9 Week 6	Staffing Training and Development	Chapt.8, 9
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10/16 Week 7	Performance Management/Feedback Employee Separation	Chapt. 10, 13
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10/25 Week 8	Compensation and Benefits	Chapt.11
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10/30 Week 9	Labor Relations; International HR	Chapt.12, 14
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11/6 Week 10	Case Presentations	
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### **Assignments and Grading**

Class Participation and Outside Reading	10%
HR Issue Analysis	45%
Case Analysis	45%

### **Class Participation:**

There are two aspects to class participation. Class participation does not mean class attendance. 1) Participation implies active contribution to class discussion. Each of you, in every session, should come prepared to participate with your colleagues (and me) after a thorough reading of the material assigned and with some thought as to the issues raised within the readings. It is also critical that we take full advantage of the experiences and knowledge that all class members have. Your work experience has provided you with numerous examples of successful and unsuccessful management of human resources. If we are to meet our objectives for the course, it is critical to explore how, why, and under what circumstances various approaches work or fail in actual practice. One easy way to “add value” to the class discussions is to be well versed on the topic/s of the week. 2) Outside reading, beyond the text material, is one way to do that. Every newspaper/magazine/periodical has material that relates to the people-management practices we discuss. Each week you are expected to read something outside of the text and email by Monday night with the citation and the two or three key points. Be ready to share that information with your classmates and me in class.

### **Case Analysis:**

DUE DATE: written paper due before class on Nov. 6; panel discussion in class on Nov. 6

There are five (5) cases at the end of the text that provide insights into how the five organizations studied practice strategic human resource management as well as how these practices contribute to the competitive advantage these organizations enjoy. These cases were written by two of the leading thinkers in the academic HR field today. For the most part, these cases succinctly illustrate how different HR functions and systems are integrated with each other’s as well as the organization’s strategy. Each case also discusses some challenges the organization faces.

These cases are a kind of capstone experience; therefore your assignment isn’t due to the last week of class after we have discussed all the topics. The cases will be distributed evenly among the class members so that a number of people are addressing each case and not everyone is addressing the same cases. You can request a specific case by the second night of class and I will attempt to honor first requests as much as possible. You will need to give me a first and second choice.

On the last night of class, we will assemble those of you who wrote up each case in a panel (each panel will have approximately 30 minutes) and give each member of the group an opportunity to present to the class the highlights of what you learned. Members of the class can ask questions and challenge you in your findings. Everyone will read all

the cases but analyze only one in depth. In your written paper, you should make references to the other cases, showing that you compared approaches or issues among the 5 organizations. Examples of comparisons: What similarities or dissimilarities did you find? Does one organization's approach also fit your organization's needs? Did you find a common thread among several cases (e.g., did everyone have a problem with one particular approach/practice?)?

In writing up your case:

- Consider the major topics addressed in class and analyze what areas represent challenges the organization in your case hasn't addressed as well as what practices have been implemented to address other HR issues.
- Identify the strategic components of the organization's HR systems
- Evaluate how well the HR systems are suited to the organization's strategy
- Predict other challenges (outside those presented in the case) that you see lying ahead for the organization and consider ways the organization may meet those challenges
- Obtain updated information on the organization's programs or policies to demonstrate what if any progress or change has occurred since the case was written

Written assignment for case analysis: I have no specific required outline or paper length for analyzing these cases. There is some opportunity to be creative here as long as you analyze the case, not just describe the company by accessing its website or other material!

Oral presentation: In preparing your 5-minute executive summary on the panel: summarize what you found. Use the 5 minutes not to give background on the organization. Everyone will have read all the cases. Use your time to hit the highlights of the written case. Don't worry if the person ahead of you made the same points. You are like a reactor panel that has gotten an advance copy of a speech and are asked to put together an analysis or critique. There is always going to be some repetition among panelists. Having only 5 minutes to summarize will require you to be very organized, succinct, and able to prioritize issues. Five minutes may be all you ever get to convince your CEO or Board of the importance of your ideas. After each panelist has presented, there will be an opportunity for general discussion about the case and students can ask each of the panelists questions.

### **"Real Life" HR Issue Paper**

DUE DATE: Oct. 30

Identify a people/HR issue that your department or entire organization is facing. You are not to research a general topic, such as work family issues, but if work/family life balance issues are a genuine problem at your organization, then address it specifically as your organization's issue.

You should present the problem, some history, whether it is being addressed and if so, how, if not, why not and how you would recommend it be addressed, how you came to identify it as an issue (e.g., there is a committee working on it, you face it, etc.) Who is concerned about this problem? Only you? How does it impact strategy, either HR strategy or general strategy? Be sure you identify the problem, not just the symptoms of it. That will help facilitate a good decision/recommendation.

Put the problem into context. Tell a little about the organization (not pages of just history about the organization...but describe enough of the organization/culture, etc. to fit the problem into the organizational context/culture/structure). Tell me a lot about the issue—is it unique to your organization or does it exist throughout your industry, i.e., stressful or unsafe working conditions; retention problems; low pay; unqualified workers, etc. Why is this the one problem you chose to address? You might kill two birds with this stone: maybe you can use the research/analysis to prepare a case for implementing your recommendation/s and/or at least get someone with authority to examine the problem. If your organization gives money for creative ideas, maybe this is your idea!

You must do more than merely identify the problem and tell war stories. This is not a stream of consciousness paper where you give pages of narrative and vignettes. This paper requires analysis: if there is data, use it. If there is no data, why not? For example, if you say you have high turnover, on what do you base that conclusion? Is one of the problems that no one collects data and then makes managers be accountable for revolving doors? We have stressed the importance of analysis and measurement. This paper is a major assignment and requires research into what other organizations are doing, what the current literature says is relevant to this issue, what process you or your management team is utilizing to resolve/address the problem,

In a nutshell, your investigation should explain the nature/sources and full extent of the problem and its consequences and examine how a variety of individual managers and/or organizations are dealing with the problem or issue, how successful these attempts appear to be, and general implications of your findings for managers.

Recommendations/solutions/alternatives/pros and cons: Based on the information from this course and some additional reading/research, how would you go about solving it if you were “the HR person/department”, the CEO, or whoever has the authority/expertise to solve. Above all, there have to be recommendations. You can’t just say there is a problem. What resources are needed to address it, what options are available? What option do you recommend and why? The issue should be introduced as if you were making a presentation to an executive meeting where you were making a report/recommendations, etc. You would want to have done some serious homework about the state of the art, what other organizations were doing (benchmarking). See if you can enlist the HR person in your organization to provide insight or input. Maybe it is something your organization is already addressing or should be addressing with input from non-HR people. If you need to research what other organizations are doing, you should offer to share your findings (like with salary survey results to participants) if that would help you gain access to information.

Your paper should be something you would be proud to present to a management group or your boss as an example of a completed project. Remember that this is a major portion of your grade and therefore I expect a professionally written paper, probably 8--10 pages. You should have some citations to outside materials you have utilized/researched. (You can use the same articles you researched for each week of class.) You should include tables of data that you analyzed/used.

In proceeding with this assignment, please feel free to consult me regarding any issues, problems, early findings, etc. that concern you. By late September you should have a topic well defined and have begun to outline your paper. I believe that with judicious topic selection you not only will enjoy this assignment but will also have the opportunity to sharpen a number of critical management skills and make a contribution to your organization.

Welcome to the world of HR management. I look forward to having you in my class and to having you share your experiences from the workplace. Your contributions will make a difference to our discussion and learning experience.